

# Love-Hate Dynamics

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## Introduction

Should Christians refuse to use imprecatory prayers when unrighteousness prevails? Are imprecatory prayers, calling upon God to render justice, for a bygone age and out of character for our Christian dispensation and disposition? Many assume so. The present article will use extracted material from my book, *Degrees of Love and Forgiveness* (DOLF), and then expand upon it in application to such questions. Can you love your enemies while praying for their destruction?

## Love-Like Tension

We have all heard the adage: *Love the sinner but hate the sin*. Adams objects, saying that this “is a very misleading slogan that has absolutely no biblical basis....Answer me this: What does God punish everlasting in hell—sin or sinners? It is impossible to detach one from the other.”<sup>1</sup> Adams is partially correct. Surely, Jn 3:16 suggests that God can love the sinner without loving the sin. Yet, God might simultaneously love and hate the sinner while exclusively hating the sinner’s sin. God’s attitude toward sin is uniform. His attitude toward the sinner is varied and complex.

From this slogan mentality, we are not necessarily surprised to hear Scripture say, “The *sacrifice* of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight” (Prov 15:8). God detests the supposedly godly service of ungodly rebellious believers. Yet, in support of Adam’s contention, let us ask, Does God always make a differentiation between His emotions toward the actions of the sin versus the sinner himself or between the actions of the walker and the walker himself? No. Let’s hear from God on the matter. He says, “The *perverse in heart* are an abomination to the Lord, but the blameless in their walk are His delight” (Prov 11:20). God not only delights in the walk of the blameless themselves. He delights in both the walk and the walker. Conversely, as also seen in this instance, the sinners themselves, not just their actions, are abominable to the Lord. God not only finds perversion abominable, He also finds the perverse abominable. As it applies to God’s people, we can reasonably infer that God dislikes those believers who walk in the darkness but likes those believers who walk in the light. Does this mean that God does not love His children who walk in the darkness? No. God can love the sinner while hating the sin because *love* does not equal *like*.

Still, such answers, although accurate, are not the whole truth of the matter. Let us pursue the matter a little more deeply. Superficially, we might suppose that God merely *dislikes* the perverse. Surely, God could not *hate* them, could He? If so, could such hate apply to perverse believers? The possibility of God hating certain people, possibly even believers, is implied in Rom 9:13, where it is written of God saying, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” One popular explanation, discussed more fully in DOLF, asserts that God loved Esau less than He did Jacob. Hate means to love one object less in comparison to another object of love. This interpretation is good insofar as it goes.

Certainly, a volitional element is involved. God volitionally rejected Esau for the birthright which normally would have belonged to Esau. For that matter, because of the circumstances, even Isaac volitionally had to reject Esau for the inheritance (Gen 27:34-38; Heb 12:6-17). Even though Isaac affectionately loved Esau more than he did Jacob, Isaac volitionally had to love Jacob more than he did Esau on that occasion. Isaac’s volitional love for Esau had to be circumscribed by the circumstances. Indeed, some interpreters, such as Constable, seek to limit Rom 9:13 to the volitional aspects: “‘Love’ and ‘hate’ are not here, then, emotions that God feels but actions that he carries out” (TCENB). Such interpreters also try to interpret Esau nationally rather than individually (cp. Dt 7:6-8; Mal 1:2-3).<sup>2</sup> While such limitations are plausible, they are not entirely satisfactory. Limiting Esau nationally to Edom is too segregated.<sup>3</sup> Also, volitional and emotional aspects of God’s love are not necessarily separated in this context. As discussed much more fully in DOLF, love can be binary in terms of volitional and affectional. At other times, it may be fuzzy and combine both dimensions.

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<sup>1</sup> Jay E. Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 113.

<sup>2</sup> BDAG would likewise define *miseo* in Rom 9:13 volitionally as “to be disinclined to, *disfavor*, *disregard* in contrast to preferential treatment” as opposed to its more widely used emotional aspect: “to have a strong aversion to, *hate*, *detest*.”

<sup>3</sup> See my book, *Salvation*, when released.

**Illustration 1. Binary-Fuzzy, Affectional-Volitional Love**

Probably, an emotional element is involved. God liked Esau less than He did Jacob. Both parents and God can have a greater volitional and affectional love for some of their children than they do others. God will volitionally disinherit His disobedient children from inheriting the kingdom (1Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5). Further, He emotionally takes no pleasure in them (Heb 10:38). God can be quite displeased, emotionally, with some of His kids. They can be estranged from Him in terms of fellowship. God is justified in loving some of His children more than others. He is not unjust to have greater affectional fellowship with those of His children who affectionately love Him. Some carnal believers pout and complain when they do not sense an intimate affection with God. However, God is not under any obligation to shower them with intimate affection when they are living in disobedience. Fellowship and intimacy with God can be hindered by carnal immaturity or by mature apostasy. Likewise, earthly parents can understandably have less intimacy with some of their children than others. When some of their children are estranging themselves from their parents, obviously parents are not under moral obligation to love all their children equally.

*Affectional-Volitional Tension*

Understanding the affectional-volitional nature of love can help us understand certain problematic texts. For instance, how do we explain the fact that Father was pleased to kill His Son? “But *the Lord* [the Father] *was pleased* [*chaphets*] *to crush Him* [His Son], *putting Him to grief*; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good *pleasure* [*chaphets*] of the Lord will prosper in His hand” (Is 53:10). The Hebrew word for *pleased* here is *chaphets* and means *to delight in*. Does this mean that the Father delighted in killing His Son? Was the Father sadistic? Did the Father find emotional pleasure in killing His Son? Intuitively, we sense there is more to the story. The LXX translates it as *boulomai*, which means *to be willing*. The ESV appropriately translates this part of the verse as: “It was the will of the Lord to crush him.” The Father was willing to sacrifice His Son, but He did not enjoy it. Understandably, many conclude that the love expressed in Jn 3:16 was purely volitional love, not emotional love. The Father did not send His Son to die for us because He liked us or because He liked killing His Son. Even though God took this action, in part, because of the affectional love He would have for bridal believers in the future after that event, His love for humanity as a whole at that point in time was purely volitional. The Father was volitionally pleased, not emotionally pleased, by the excruciating crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> This is a valid point, a valid vantage point, though even this binary volitional-versus-affectional explanation may not be the whole story.

How about the use of *chaphets* and *boulomai* in the second half of Is 53:10? While translations like the NAS err in translating both occurrences in terms of emotional pleasure, the ESV probably errs in translating both occurrences in terms of volitional decision: “The *will* of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” This latter part of the verse probably includes both elements of love—emotional and volitional. An appropriate translation would be: “The *joyful will* of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” However, one may object that this imports an interpretation into the translation. Even so, it is a reasonable understanding of the text.

How about rape? Is God delighted over rape? Some say so. They put two verses together from Deuteronomy and think that they have rightly put two and two together to conclude that in some cases God is delighted by rape.

<sup>4</sup> Concerning the first occurrence, WBC comments that it “is a term used of sovereigns. Their *pleasure* is equivalent to their *will* in a matter.” That volitional interpretation is a good explanation for the first occurrence, but it should not be thought that the term necessarily excludes emotional satisfaction enjoined with volitional decision in every context.

Here are the two verses:

- “You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall violate her [i.e., rape her]; you shall build a house, but you shall not live in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but you shall not use its fruit” (Dt 28:30).
- “And it shall come about that as the Lord *delighted* [*sus*] over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the Lord will *delight* [*sus*] over you to make you perish and destroy you; and you shall be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it” (Dt 28:63).

Their logic runs like this:

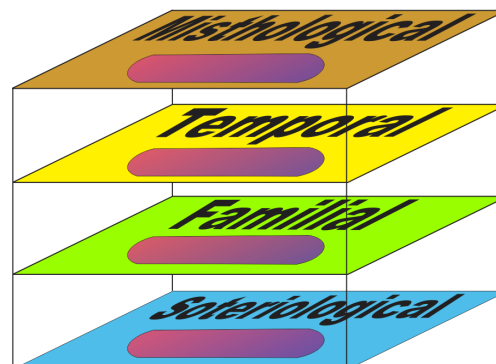
1. The Lord was delighted to punish them.
2. Part of that punishment included rape.
3. Therefore, the Lord delighted to punish them with rape.

The Hebrew word used here is *sus* and is normally translated as *delight*. However, WBC states that a better understanding in this context is volitional—that *sus*, “translated here as ‘took delight,’ carries a volitional sense.” Just as an exclusively volitional interpretation of *chaphets* is best for the first part of Is 53:10, but does not necessarily exclude an emotional satisfaction enjoined with volitional decision in the second part of the verse, so the exclusively volitional use of *sus* in the second part of Dt 28:63 should not preclude us from seeing an inclusively volitional-emotional usage of *sus* in the first part of the verse. Just because a word is used with its full dual meaning in one context does not prove that it must be understood with its full dual meaning in every context or even when used twice within the same verse. That the emotional aspect is missing in the second usage of *sus* is deductively clarified elsewhere:

- “Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord God, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live? (Eze 18:23)
- “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord God. “Therefore, repent and live.” (Eze 18:32)
- “Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord God, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’ (Eze 33:11)

Although *chaphets* is used in these verses, the point is clearly applicable to *sus*. From the use of *chaphets* in these verses, we must conclude that, at least in some aspect, God does not take emotional pleasure in the death of the wicked. When seen from this vantage point, God does not take emotional delight in making the wicked perish or in destroying them. Consequently, we may safely deduce logically from this vantage point that the second use of *sus* in Dt 28:63 cannot be referring to His emotional delight in causing the wicked to perish or in destroying them. At the very least, translators and interpreters must show discretion to know whether a passage talking about God’s *delight*, *pleasure*, or *love* is describing His response from a perspective that is: (1) *emotional* or (2) *volitional* or (3) *emotional-volitional*. Sometimes the Lord’s response will be binary: emotional or volitional. Sometimes it will be fuzzy: emotional and volitional. Sometimes it may even depend upon whether we are looking at God’s emotional or volitional or emotional-volitional response from one vantage point versus another vantage point versus multiple vantage points. The same is true of our responses to others as well. Sometimes our love for others will be *emotional*; sometimes it will simply be *volitional*; at other times it will be *emotional-volitional*

**Illustration 2. God’s Emotional Complexity**



God's love is capable of simultaneous affectional-volitional variations at various levels. God's love, as is ours, is complex and complicated. Simplistic views of God's love are for the immature, for little children, who draw a picture of a red heart and think that it tells the full story, or who pick daisy petals, saying, "He loves me; He loves me not." Sometimes love is that simple; many times it is not. God can love us differently at different levels. The above illustration reminds us that God's love may vary as binary-fuzzy, affectional-volitional at various levels. The same is true of our love.

### *Love-Hate Tension*

Having surveyed this highly condensed discussion of love from DOLF, we can advance to new material by considering additional biblical texts regarding godly hate. In certain texts, hating is the godly thing to do. For example, in several texts we are enjoined to hate evil: "*Hate evil*, you who love the Lord" (Ps 97:10). Hating evil goes hand-in-hand with loving the Lord. Similarly, "the fear of the Lord is to *hate evil*" (Prov 8:13). "*Hate evil*, love good" (Amos 5:15). "*Strongly hate* [*apostugeo*] what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom 12:9; TM).<sup>5</sup> The Bible commands us to do both: love and hate.

Are we supposed to just hate the sin but not the sinner? At the popular level, many assume so. After all, Jesus commanded us to love our enemies rather than hate them (Mt 5:43-44; cp. Lk 6:27,35). We are commanded to love those who hate us. Conversely, Jesus commanded us to hate those whom we love: "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Lk 14:26). Granted, with help from its companion passage, this latter passage can be interpreted rather easily as *love less in comparison to*: "He who loves father or mother *more than* Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter *more than* Me is not worthy of Me" (Mt 10:37). Comparatively, we are to love Jesus sacrificially far more than others whom we love naturally. BDAG does well to put *miseo* (*hate*) in Lk 14:26 in the category of showing preferential treatment. We are to give preferential treatment to Jesus. To be sure, BDAG is also correct to put Rom 9:13 in this category as well. God gave preferential treatment to Jacob over Esau. Nonetheless, a fuzzy semantic overlap between the two categories pertaining to Esau is reasonable.

God does not like it when believers follow Esau's example and despise their birthright (Heb 12:16). In fact, God has "no pleasure in" such believers (Heb 10:38), which is a litotetic way of saying that He is very displeased with them. The logical inference is that God disliked Esau despising his birthright and disliked Esau as a result. Comparatively speaking, God loved Jacob more than Esau, so much so that He says that He loved Jacob and hated Esau. We are expected to follow God's example, which is why we are to love our enemies:

<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you <sup>45</sup> in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt 5:44-48)

God does good to those who hate Him and loves those who hate Him, volitionally providing for their needs. For this reason, we are expected to do the same: "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Lk 6:27-28). We do not necessarily have to like them in order to love them. At times, we will volitionally have to love them despite not liking them. This *love-like* tension and dynamic is well known. But can it be said that we can love them while simultaneously hating them? Is it biblical to hate those whom we are to love? Is a *love-hate* tension biblical? Is our hatred of evil biblically supposed to extend to hatred of evildoers? Certainly, at least in multiple contexts, it should. The Palmist repeatedly says,

- I hate those who regard vain idols; but I trust in the Lord. (Ps 31:6).
- I hate those who are double-minded, but I love Thy law. (Ps 119:113).
- Do I not hate those who hate Thee, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against Thee? I hate them with the *utmost hatred*; they have become my enemies. (Ps 139:21-22)

<sup>5</sup> *Apostugeo* is a compound word, derived from *apo* and *stugeo* (*to hate*). L-N defines *apostugeo* as "to have a strong dislike for someone or something, implying repulsion and desire for avoidance – 'to hate, to despise.'" BADG defines it as: "to have a vehement dislike for someth., *hate strongly*, *abhor*."

This *utmost hatred* for his enemies in Ps 139:22 is also rendered by English translations as: *perfect hatred, complete hatred, extreme hatred, unlimited hatred, fierce hatred, absolute hatred, nothing but hatred, hating without limits, and total hatred*. The immediate context of the verse begins in verse 19 with an imprecatory prayer: “O that Thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God; depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed” (Ps 139:19), which is in turn followed by an explanation: “For they speak against Thee wickedly, and Thine enemies take Thy name in vain” (Ps 139:20). Their disobedient hatred for God is the basis for David’s hatred for them. His hatred is not because of personal spite or vindictiveness in this verse. Indeed, the OT law prohibited him from hating his fellow countryman in his heart or taking personal vengeance or bearing a grudge (Lev 19:17-18). The NT warns us against having a root of bitterness (Heb 12:15) or taking personal vengeance (Rom 12:17-21). Accordingly, some have inferred that David did not really mean that he hated them, just their sinful ways. Supposedly, his hatred is not personal or emotional. Yet even those writing from this perspective admit that we should not blame David for feeling righteous indignation for those who hate God. Accordingly, such admissions strain the credibility of claims that David did not hate these enemies in his heart.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the reply that “we hate the sin and love the sinner” is suspect and makes one suspect that such claims have tried to stand David’s statement on head and hide his indignant feelings. Perhaps, instead of trying to suppress such emotions, it would be more healthy to acknowledge them for what they are—righteous, if they meet biblical criteria.

David was right to feel this way. We have the same right. Tim Hayes has an excellent online discussion of Ps 139:21, and the whole article is a worthy read.<sup>7</sup> Since it is readily assessable online, a brief interaction here suffices. The Lord hates “all who do iniquity” (Ps 5:5). The Lord “abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit” (Ps 5:6). Godly hatred is a godly quality because hate is a part of love. Indeed, perfect love requires perfect hate. Godly hatred hates ungodly hatred. Not all hatred is godly. Godly hatred is a necessary part of love and is healthy. Ungodly hatred is a sinful distortion of godly hatred and is antithetical to brotherly love (1Jn 3:15). Love for righteousness is righteousness. Love for unrighteousness is unrighteousness. Inversely, hatred of unrighteousness is righteous. Hatred of righteousness is unrighteous. Hate is the inverse of love, not the opposite of love. Hayes explains:

Hate and love are the intrinsic expressions of every godly heart. What we love, its opposite we hate. The two emotions spring from the very same heart with the very same motive. If we love humility, then we hate arrogance, as God hates pride and loves humility. If we love the world we cannot love the kingdom of God, and if we love God we will hate the god of this world. If we love righteousness and goodness we will hate wickedness and evil... and visa versa. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will **hate** the one, **and love** the other; or else he will **hold to** the one, and **despise** the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matt 6:24) See how hate and love go together... and cannot be separated.

The opposite of love is not hate... the opposite of both hate and love is apathy. Caring intensely is both love and hate: the opposite of caring intensely is not caring at all. If you have no hatred, then you have no love. If you do not care... to hate or love... you serve nothing... you are dysfunctional, immobile, sick, broken.

To study perfect hatred is to study perfect love. To have the one is to have the other. To lack either is to be empty of both. [Sic. Ellipsis and emphasis his.]

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<sup>6</sup> See “Do We Hate with Perfect Hatred?” Available at: <https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016/01/25/do-we-hate-with-perfect-hatred>. Also see “I Hate Them with Perfect Hatred.” Available at: <https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2015/05/17/i-hate-them-with-perfect-hatred>. Accessed 11/15/2020. Some commentators favor an exclusively volitional form of hate state: “To hate someone meant to reject him and to disavow any loving association with him” (Blaising, BNK, cf. Mal 1:3). “By ‘hate’ David meant he rejected them (cf. Mal. 1:3)” (Constable, TCENB). In contrast to the emotionally neutral position, some commentators acknowledge the emotional aspect: “The extent of this feeling of hatred is expressed by a word which denotes the *extreme end* of an object” (ACHS, Lange; emphasis his). “He feels for them *a perfect hatred*, that is, complete hatred, without a drop of compassion or good will; and he looks upon them as his own *enemies*” (UBSH, Bratcher). “If we shared his commitment to moral emotions (21) and his unreserved commitment (23–24) we would find no other words possible” (Motyer, NBC).

<sup>7</sup> Hayes, “Perfect Hatred.” Available at [http://www.ableever.net/Exhortation/Perfect\\_Hatred/perfect\\_hatred.html](http://www.ableever.net/Exhortation/Perfect_Hatred/perfect_hatred.html). Accessed 11/15/2020.

Hayes continues with an extended explanation and examples that are highly recommended, showing, for example, how God both loves and hates the sinner. Haley applies the same type of solution in recycling David's hatred of his enemies in Ps 139:21-22 with Jesus instruction in Lk 6:35 to love our enemies: "Viewed simply as depraved and corrupt, he 'hated' them; viewed as human beings, he loved them, and desired their repentance and reformation."<sup>8</sup>

A question might be raised, though, regarding Hayes' assessment and admonition: "A selfish and wicked heart hates a man and seeks to destroy him. A righteous heart hates a man and seeks his welfare....Love others by seeking their welfare, but hate everything about the wicked that comprises them and makes them tick, counting them your enemies and hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." In the context of vv. 21-22, was David truly seeking the welfare of the wicked when, in v. 19, he expressed his wish that the Lord "would slay the wicked"?

Several answers may be provided on Hayes' behalf. As a rule of thumb, love seeks the welfare of those who are loved. However, situations can be easily posed in which one must stop seeking the welfare of the one whose is loved. For example, suppose a police officer comes upon a domestic dispute in which his friend, Joe, is about to kill his wife with a knife. The only way the officer can stop Joe from killing his wife is to shoot and kill his friend, and he does so. Does this mean that he did not love his friend? No. Killing him was the only way to prevent the murder and save Joe's wife. Seeking the welfare of his friend at that point by refusing to shoot him would not have been the loving thing to do.

Likewise, sometimes people reach a point where they are so hardened in their sin that seeking their welfare is no longer the loving thing to do. John envisions some type of similar situation when he says, "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this" (1Jn 5:16). A point can be reached where the biblical mandate to pray for the welfare of a Christian brother is no longer applicable. If that point can be reached pertaining to fellow believers, then certainly it can be reached regarding others.

#### *Imprecatory Prayers*

What about people who have become callus in their murder of babies via abortion? Are we to pray for the welfare of those who are taking knives to kill the innocent children? Or are to pray imprecatory prayers? How about government officials or political candidates who will promote abortion? As a rule of thumb, we are to pray for our leaders (1Tim 2:1-4). If prayers for their repentance lead to no avail, however, should we not pray for their removal if they are promoting abortion?

Kandt provides twenty-two biblical reasons we should pray imprecatory prayers and ends with a discussion of this passage from Psalms: "The Psalms would not be a true mirror of the human soul without portraying our anger and rage."<sup>9</sup> Are we required to be emotionally neutral about abortion when we pray and ask God to put an end to it? No. Far from it! The Palmist exhorts God to "pour out Thine indignation on them, and may Thy burning anger overtake them" (Ps 69:24). Certainly, we should lovingly pray for our enemies. David did also, saying, "I will teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners will be converted to Thee" (Ps 51:13). Lovingly seeking to teach them and covert them is the initial and primary objective. Yet, in response to those who responded to David's love with hatred, he launches a lengthy imprecation (Ps 109:4-31). What about those who have rejected God's love for unborn children by promoting their murder? Befittingly, Steve Quayle calls for imprecatory prayers in various cases within our political climate. For those who refuse your loving instruction and calls for repentance, the time may come when you should pray for their destruction. The lives of others may be at stake. Abortion is one such case.

Various attempts have been used to try to explain (away) imprecatory prayers. Yet biblical observations establish healthy parameters, as Laney surmises:

It is significant that David never prayed that he may be permitted to take vengeance on his enemies, but always that *God* would become his avenger....The psalmist's passion was for justice, and the imprecatory psalms are not sourced in personal vindictiveness or bitter malice that seeks revenge....David's concern was for vindication—justice—a concern which also the New Testament upholds (Emphasis his.)<sup>10</sup>

Strangely, though, Laney concludes:

<sup>8</sup> John W. Haley, *An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 306.

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Kandt, "22 Reasons to Pray the Cursing (Imprecatory) Psalms." Available at <https://praypsalms.org/22-reasons-to-pray-the-cursing-psalms-b4a85ae40aa9>. Accessed 11/16/2020.

<sup>10</sup> J. C. Laney, "A Fresh Look at the Imprecatory Psalms," *BibSac* 138, (1981): 42-43

One can appreciate the Old Testament setting of the imprecatory psalms and teach and preach from them. However, like the ceremonial dietary laws of the Old Testament, the imprecations in the Psalms should not be applied to church-age saints. This is clear from Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:14, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not." Paul admonished the Romans, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (12:19). Paul's words in 2 Timothy 4:14 indicate that he practiced what he preached. Rather than calling down divine wrath on Alexander the coppersmith, Paul simply stated, "The Lord will repay him according to his deeds." And John makes it clear that God in the future will judge the wicked for their sin (Rev. 20:11–15).<sup>11</sup>

Laney pits the OT against the NT and David against Paul on this matter. However, David is in harmony with Paul. So why does Laney attempt to use Paul to discount David as no longer being applicable? Laney acknowledges that David was not taking his own vengeance. Like Paul, David wrote his rebuke and called upon the Lord to take action. Even though David was king, he did not execute these enemies against whom he is calling upon God for justice. Both David and Paul wrote, rebuked, and invoked. David in his Psalms and Paul in his epistles called upon the Lord to execute judgement. David and Paul are in agreement.

Contrary to Laney's claim, Paul did express an imprecatory wish in 2Tim 4:14. Granted, various translations follow the critical text as rendering a statement of future fact, "The Lord *will* repay him according to his deeds." However, the majority text renders it as an optative. Therefore, the KJV translates it as: "The Lord *reward* him according to his deeds." And the NKJ clarifies: "*May* the Lord repay him according to his works." This reading is superior. Paul and David concur about the applicability of imprecatory prayers when warranted.

As for Laney's attempt to use John to discount David, John makes it clear that heavenly saints pray imprecatory prayers:

<sup>9</sup> And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; <sup>10</sup> and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" <sup>11</sup> And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also. (Rev 6:9-11)

Laney mentions this passage but fails to consider its full significance. First, as Laney admits, this NT passage demonstrates that "such imprecations are not limited to the Old Testament, but are found in the New Testament as well."<sup>12</sup> The NT accords with the OT on this matter. Second, since these imprecatory prayers are being offered by heavenly saints, such imprecatory prayers cannot be sinful. Third, it is highly unlikely that these imprecatory prayers are limited to the future dispensation. The most intuitive conclusion is that these imprecatory prayers are being offered by saints currently in Heaven. Berner, a prophetic expert, explains why:

The fifth seal reveals an interesting group of souls under the altar in heaven who have been martyred for their testimony to God. They had been slain because of their adherence to the word of God. The scripture does not specifically state that they were slain as a result of testimony concerning Christ, thus **it cannot lie definitively argued that this group excludes Old Testament believers in God.** Many authors claim that this group represents Christians slain during the Tribulation period, but the passage does not specifically make that statement. Revelation 6:9-11 makes no reference to the Tribulation period at all. These souls cry out to God in a loud voice. The question these souls focus on is: **"How long, O Lord, holy and true, will Yon refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"** This is a direct appeal to God asking Him when He will break His long period of silence and impose judgment upon the world. This question directly reveals that God has not yet broken His silence. God's judgments have not yet begun to fall upon the earth. This question reflects the collective frustration of many souls waiting through the long period of God's

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 36.

heavenly silence while injustice prevails on the earth. This is not a question asked by martyrs who have just been slain during the beginning portion of the Tribulation period, after God is beginning to act against the world in judgment. This group of martyrs represents souls slain over an earlier and much longer period of time — the entire expanse of time of the Church Age and possibly the Old Testament Age as well. These martyrs are asking this question at a point in time before God breaks His silence — before the first seal is broken by Christ. They are given white robes and told to rest — “until *the number* of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.” This is not a prediction that there will be further martyrs during the Tribulation period which will be added to this specific group. These souls are not being told to wait until the end of the Tribulation before God will break His silence and act in judgment.

What group of people is revealed in prophecy that will be specifically numbered or that has a pre-ordained number of souls? That group is the Church of Christ which will be called out of the world by Christ when the last allotted soul enters the group. The martyrs during the Tribulation will not comprise a special group which will be “completed.” But the Church of the present age will. The passage of the fifth seal is looking backwards from the nexus at the beginning of the Day of the Lord, describing the Church of Christ of the present Church Age, all of the souls who have died in Christ, who will be completed and resurrected, and translated into spiritual bodies and taken up to heaven along with the living believers in the event known as the rapture. The entire focus of the fifth seal is a pretribulational picture of frustration directed at the big unknown — just how long God is going to wait before He breaks His silence. **Once the seal judgments are opened and the Day of the Lord judgments are released, then these souls will not have any need to ask this question.**<sup>13</sup> (Bold and italics his.)

In previous writings, I have entertained the various possibilities for identifying this heavenly group of martyrs as: (1) pre-raptured saints, (2) raptured saints, or (3) tribulational saints. Time dilation (in which time passes much more slowly on Earth than in Heaven) allowed me to retain the possibility of the latter two explanations. Even so, both of those latter explanations suffer from a fatal flaw. They presume that the question is addressing how long until the Lord *concludes* His judgment by coming to Earth to set foot on it and render His final judgment at the conclusion of the Tribulation. However, these saints are asking how long until the Lord *commences* judgment on the Earth. This judgment commences at the commencement of the Day of the Lord at the time of the Rapture. Therefore, it must be conceded that Berner’s position is far more plausible than the contending possibilities.

The most reasonable corollary, then, is that these are OT and NT saints who have been (arriving) in New Jerusalem ever since Christ took captivity captive and ascended on high at the time of His ascension (see MMP4 and MMP5). These saints are given white robes as a pre-Bema reward as they cry out for the Lord to execute judgment on the Earth. Believers having NDEs report seeing saints in New Jerusalem wearing white robes. A logical inference, therefore, would be that when martyrs are killed and taken to the heavenly New Jerusalem, they implore the Lord to execute judgment on the Earth. They are given white robes and told to rest for a little while until the number of martyrs from the church age is completed. Then God will break His silence at the Rapture and commence His judgment on the Earth via the Day of the Lord. For two thousand years, millions of martyrs have been arriving in New Jerusalem and offering imprecatory prayers. One must conclude, accordingly, that offering imprecatory prayers is quite in keeping with the NT era of grace. Laney’s appeal to John to discredit David fails.

Laney also overstates his case regarding personal vindictiveness as well. To be sure, we are exhorted not to vindicate ourselves by taking revenge. The Lord is the avenger. However, David vindicated himself in his writings, and Paul does also in his. Yet both biblical writers left the ultimate vindication of passing judgment up to the Lord and called upon Him to vindicate them and pass judgment on those who had harmed them personally. The Lord is trusted with exercising justice on their personal behalf. For Paul, it was personal: “Alexander the coppersmith *did me* much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works” (2Tim 2:14; NKJ). For David, it was personal. After giving a long list of imprecations, David says in Ps 109:20: “Let this be the reward of *my accusers* from the Lord, and of those who *speak evil against my soul*” (NAS). “May this be the reward of my accusers from the Lord, of those who speak evil against my life!” (ESV). Here, the NAS and ESV agree with the KJV and NJV that David is offering an obvious imprecation. The same conclusion should be reached regarding 2Tim 2:14. David and Paul are expressing the same Spirit.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas Berner, *When God Intervenes: The Beginning of the End* (Create Space, 2013), 65-66.



*Conclusion*

In an article not only defending Christian imprecation but also calling for it when countering tyrants like Attila the Hun, Wightman says, “President Hibben, of Princeton University, uttered the spirit of the imprecatory Psalms in saying: ‘The test of the individual, the test of a nation, is the capacity for righteous indignation; when we are confronted with great moral wrongs we must oppose them with the anger that is like the flaming sword of the wrath of God.’”<sup>14</sup> May the Lord give us a portion of that same Spirit as we face the moral evils facing our nation. Likewise, Phillips comments on Ps 139:21-22, “There is such a thing as holy hatred, being righteously indignant and angry, abhorring those who mount attacks on the creator and sustainer of the universe” (JPCS). We are living in a time when more than a little righteous indication is called for in calling upon to the Lord to execute judgment in righteous imprecation.

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<sup>14</sup> J. R. Wightman, Y. Gola, W. A. Jarrel, Harold M. Wiener, “Critical Notes” *BibSac* 76(302), (1919): 230.